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Street, J, Worley, M and Wilkinson, D ORCID logoORCID:
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‘Does it threaten the status quo?’ Elite Responses to British Punk, 1976–78

John Street, Matthew Worley and David Wilkinson

Contact details

John Street

Work address: School of politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies,
University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ

Email: j.street@uea.ac.uk

Phone: 01603 592067

Matthew Worley

Work address: Department of History, University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading
RG6 6AA

(Home address: 59 Beaconsfield Road, Norwich, NR3 4PN)

Email: m.worley@reading.ac.uk

Phone: 07980 829 363

David Wilkinson

Work address: Department of English, Manchester Metropolitan University,
Manchester M15 6LL

Email: d.wilkinson@mmu.ac.uk

Phone: 0161 247 6153

Biographies

John Street is a professor of politics at the University of East Anglia. His most recent books are *Music and Politics* (Polity, 2013) and (with Sanna Inthorn and Martin Scott) *From Entertainment to Citizenship: Politics and Popular Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2013). Having spent the last few years researching (separately) punk and copyright policy, he is now focusing on protest music in the present and the past.

Matthew Worley is professor of modern history at the University of Reading. He has written several books and articles on British politics and is currently researching the links between politics and youth culture. A monograph, *Nowhere/Boredom: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-84*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2017.

David Wilkinson is Lecturer in English at Manchester Metropolitan University. He is the author of *Post-Punk, Politics and Pleasure in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and is involved with the Interdisciplinary Network for the Study of Subcultures, Popular Music and Social Change. His current research focuses on countercultural legacies in contemporary culture and politics.

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Abstract

The emergence of punk in Britain (1976-78) is recalled and documented as a moment of rebellion, one in which youth culture was seen to challenge accepted values and forms of behaviour, and to set in motion a new kind of cultural politics. In this article we do two things. First, we ask how far punk’s challenge extended. Did it penetrate those political, cultural and social elites against which it set itself? And second, we reflect on the problem of recovering the history and politics of moments such as punk, and on the value of archives to such exercises in recuperation. In pursuit of both tasks, we make use of a wide range of historical sources, relying on these rather than on retrospective oral or autobiographical accounts. We set our findings against the narratives offered both by subcultural and mainstream histories of punk. We show how punk’s impact on elites can be detected in the rhetoric of the popular media, and in aspects of the practice of local government and the police. Its impact on other elites (e.g. central government or the monarchy) is much harder to discern. These insights are important both for enriching our understanding of the political significance of punk and for how we approach the historical record left by popular music.

Introduction

‘There is but one criteria’, the Sex Pistols’ in-house fanzine stated in late 1976, ‘does it threaten the status quo?’¹ This is an important question, not simply for fans of the Sex Pistols, but for those who wish to write the history of any musical genre. In the case of punk, two historical narratives have tended to dominate. The first, drawing

on the template provided by Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), has argued that punk challenged the established order and subverted accepted norms. Other historians, particularly those intent upon capturing the sweep of the twentieth century, have consigned punk to the sidelines. While there may be a case for both these narratives, they share a weakness. Neither of them devote much attention to the historical traces left by punk or its impact on those to whom punk anger and frustration was directed. In this article we ask what the historical record reveals of punk's first years. In doing so, we accept that punk's history resides in both the way it expressed itself, in the networks it forged and in the larger social trends that mark historical change. We also acknowledge the many autobiographies and other accounts provided by participants in the rise of punk. What we offer, by contrast, is the story of punk's early years as it is revealed in the archives of the elites against whom punk set itself. We hope that, in doing so, we raise valuable questions about how the history and politics of subcultural revolts can be researched and documented.

Punk was certainly reported as a threat to the status quo. The Sex Pistols' debut single, 'Anarchy in the UK' (1976), was described by Jon Savage as a 'scrambled newscast from a world beset by terrorist forces'.² 'On 26 November 1976', Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons noted, 'the cold black copies of "Anarchy in the UK" poured off the presses and it was the greatest youth frustration anthem ever released. Just over three minutes of blind raging fury.'³ For Mark Perry, writing in his *Sniffin' Glue* fanzine, 'Anarchy in the UK' 'destroys all the rock 'n' roll laws. Just by getting this thing released the Pistols have kicked the establishment right in the balls [...] it is the most important record that's ever been released'.⁴

The band's 'foul-mouthed' appearance on Bill Grundy's early evening TV *Today* programme in December 1976 further fuelled their anti-establishment image. It was compounded, in the summer of 1977, by 'God Save the Queen', the group's dissection of Britain's fading imperial prowess, released to coincide with the 'mad parade' of the Queen's Silver Jubilee.⁵ With Jamie Reid's artwork and the taboo-breaking couture of Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, the Sex Pistols could seem to embody a powerful, politically charged youth culture. It was a view shared by the press and politicians. The *Sunday People* declaimed: '[Punk's] purpose is to shock. Its objective is to smash the system, depose the monarchy, throw convention out the window.'⁶ In the House of Commons, a government minister stated for the record: 'One of the problems with punk rock [...] is that the whole idea is to be against the Establishment and the adult population'.⁷ This view of punk as a site of rebellion continues to attract and divide popular and scholarly attention.⁸

The debate over punk began with the claims of cultural studies' scholars such as Dick Hebdige who argued that punk was not simply a response to the economic and political crises that ruptured the 1970s, but a dramatization of them. 'The various stylistic ensembles adopted by the punks', Hebdige insisted, 'were undoubtedly expressive of genuine aggression, frustration and anxiety.'⁹ It was this that explained punk's capacity 'to produce the requisite outraged responses from the parents, teachers and employers towards whom the moral panic was directed and from the "moral entrepreneurs" – the local councilors, the pundits and MPs – who were responsible for conducting the "crusade" against it.'¹⁰ In similar vein, Dave Laing argued that punk's 'shock-effects [...] undermined structures of meaning as well as systems of ideology.'¹¹ Some thirty years later, cultural studies scholars

continued with this theme, seeing punk's 'musical amateurism' as a 'subversion of the capitalist control of music practice.'¹² Not that this view is uncontested.¹³ The cultural sociologist Nick Crossley is the most recent dissident. In his detailed social network analysis of punk's genesis in four English cities, he raises serious doubts about the degree and significance of punk's political dimension.¹⁴

Now, forty years after its origins in the UK, historians too are giving sustenance to this view of punk as a source of subversion. Taking their lead from Jon Savage's insider account of punk, in which he describes the Sex Pistols as inserting the idea of anarchy, 'like a homoeopathic remedy, into a society that was already becoming polarized'¹⁵, academic historians have applied their approach to punk's past. Mark Garnett, for example, has argued that punk 'was at least partly responsible for the subsequent cultural divisions within British society', and Matthew Worley has documented how punk provided a cultural site for political expression that embodied and reflected perspectives, anxieties and disaffections of the time.¹⁶

Other historians – most recently, Dominic Sandbrook – have been less convinced of punk's importance, sometimes confining it (metaphorically and literally) to a footnote.¹⁷ Kenneth Morgan's postwar narrative allows the Sex Pistols a cursory mention.¹⁸ Brian Harrison's exhaustive study of Britain's history through the 1970s to 1990 makes but a passing reference to the protest of 'God Save the Queen'.¹⁹ Andy Beckett is more attentive, though his focus is directed primarily towards Rock Against Racism, the musician-led campaign against the National Front that flowered simultaneously (and overlapped) with punk.²⁰ Lawrence Black goes so far as to question whether the attention given to punk at the time (and since) has

been overstated in relation to other cultural forms, particularly disco.²¹ As for Andrew Marr's overtly populist *History of Modern Britain* (2007), punk is reduced to a publicity stunt involving 'juvenile political attacks in songs such as "Anarchy in the UK"'.²²

This article is intended as a contribution to the debate engendered by these competing historical claims. It does so by focusing on a specific aspect of punk anger: the elites that it saw as dominating the UK. Almost none of the accounts of punk – whatever side they take – have asked about the evidence of punk's impact on the established order. This article does so by revisiting punk's early years (1976–78) to ask whether, in fact, the British elite was troubled by its rise. In doing so, we seek to enrich, rather than dismiss, the account of punk as subcultural resistance, traced through art school theories, personal networks, socio-economic context and the undulations of the music industry.²³

Our question is directed at whether punk's cultural and political challenge permeated government and other powerful institutions – the monarchy, local government, the police, universities and mainstream media. Rather than adopting punk's own rhetoric of rebellion, we want to ask whether its effects went deeper than the media-generated moral panics that helped shape its reception. We are not intent upon trivializing or discounting such mediated responses; they are an important part of the story of popular culture and its oppositional politics.²⁴ The apparently ephemeral and transitory character of popular culture can belie its significance for the sensibilities and identities – the 'structure of feeling'²⁵ – that emerge from moments of cultural pleasure. But these sentiments do not emerge in a vacuum. The structure of feeling is intimately linked to the structure of power, and

this latter, and its own response to punk, has tended to be overlooked or unexamined in the writing of punk's history. It is for this reason that we have focused our attention upon the 'local councils, universities and the Rank Leisure Group' that Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons claimed were trembling at the prospect of the Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy in the UK' tour coming to their respective towns, cities and venues.²⁶ Was this the case, and how can such a question be answered? Specifically, what does the historical record reveal of punk's first moments in the political sun?

Background: from Rock Around the Clock to Anarchy in the UK

In revisiting punk's history and its effect upon established interests, we have in mind a prior example of popular cultural rebellion and the writing of its history. The birth of rock 'n' roll in the mid-50s generated a similar response to punk.²⁷ In the UK, the iconic moment is often taken to be the screening of *Rock Around the Clock* (1956), featuring performances by Bill Haley and the Comets, that reportedly turned young men and women into wild rebels and, thereafter, provided historians with a watershed moment to define new attitudes and voices expressed through an emergent teenage culture.²⁸ For example, Kenneth Morgan writes that the film brought 'teenage hysteria to hosts of cinemas', prompting 'much violence' and revealing 'the liberating experience of "rock and roll"'.²⁹

In fact, there is relatively little hard evidence to support such media-driven accounts. Sandbrook, with a jaundiced twenty-first century eye, records a few confrontations between cinema managers and audiences. These were, he suggests, exceptions rather than the rule.³⁰ A similarly temperate note is struck by David

Kynaston, who finds that despite newspaper reports of 'rioting' and the subsequent banning of *Rock Around the Clock* by several councils, Home Office files reveal only 25 complaints received from 400 cinemas.³¹

A history built on newspaper headlines may need to be qualified by the dry documentation of archival record. In this spirit, we ask whether punk suffers a similar fate when examined in this way. For punk's *Rock Around the Clock* moment see the 'Grundy incident', from which point the Sex Pistols entered the popular consciousness as something more than 'just a band'. They seemed to have the power to provoke a reaction from the established hierarchy. Over the course of 1976–77, both EMI and A&M sacked the Sex Pistols from their respective labels, ostensibly on account of the band's unruly behaviour. The 'Anarchy' tour of 1976, headed by the Sex Pistols alongside The Clash, The Damned and Johnny Thunders' Heartbreakers, was reduced to tatters by the decision of local authorities and others to refuse them permission to play. Across the country, councils and venue owners took similar measures to prevent punk gigs taking place. The tabloid media voiced the supposed horror of their readers at swearing punks on early evening television. The BBC banned 'God Save the Queen', while those responsible for compiling the charts were accused of rigging the No. 1 spot to prevent to the Sex Pistols from occupying it on the week of the Jubilee. Simultaneously, the police raided the boat on which the Sex Pistols were floating up the Thames in mock celebration of the Queen's anniversary.

Revisiting the scene

By returning to the archives, this article asks what marks – if any – punk left on the various elites to which its anger was directed. How far can the traditional historical approach contribute to our evaluation of a phenomenon like punk. By ‘traditional’ historical approach we mean a reliance on archival documentary evidence, rather than interviewing participants or using their memoirs.³² There are two reasons for this. The first is that there is already an extensive library of punk memoirs and oral histories.³³ Though there are exceptions, relatively little attempt has been made to document punk by more traditional historical methods.³⁴ Secondly, the claims made for punk, both by its friends and enemies, are rarely supported by direct evidence. Consequently, punk risks being mythologized rather than systematically analyzed. Our approach uses the ‘historical record’ as it is conventionally understood to both complement and explore the claims made for punk by its participants and commentators.

‘Punk’ is here defined primarily as the music made by those who claimed that title in the UK in the late 1970s, or to whom the label was ascribed by journalists and other mediators in that period. It refers to a genre of rock music, but also to a code of dress, a life-style and a phase in the histories of popular culture. It was, in this sense, a ‘subculture’ created both by the musicians, their managers, labels, music journalists and fans, and by the mainstream media.³⁵

The final definitional issue is that of the ‘establishment’ or the ‘established order’. There is, of course, a long tradition of analyzing the British establishment.³⁶ But such accounts tend to rest on a prior assumption that such an entity exists. We prefer the less theoretically-laden term, the elite(s). And rather than identifying those a priori, our focus is on the elites that were explicitly targeted by punks (the

monarchy, the political institutions, the police) and that found themselves in confrontation with punk (print and broadcast media, local government, higher education). There is one notable exclusion from this list: the music industry, on which it might be said that punk had its most significant impact.³⁷ This may be true, but we would contend that the record business does not form part of a governing elite in the way that our chosen institutions do. Because our concern is with punk's impact on the traditional bastions of political power, we do not include the industry here.

Our research has been based upon searches of the National Archives, the BBC's archives, the archives of the Greater London Council, the National Sound Archive at the British Library, the records of the Metropolitan and Manchester police forces, the Mary Whitehouse archive at the University of Essex, and the archives of the University of East Anglia. We have also consulted official histories of the monarchy, parliamentary records, and the contemporary diaries of senior government figures. Finally, we have examined the print and online versions of the mainstream press and the music press. In the course of this research, we have tried to identify elite references and responses to 'punk' or 'punks'. We present our findings below. Each section deals with a specific elite: the monarchy, central government, local government, the police, higher education, the broadcasting and print media. We accept that such archival resources are necessarily limited in what they reveal, but this is not, in itself, a reason to ignore them. They are part of punk's story (and, as far as we can tell, we are the first to see what they have to tell).

'God Save the Queen': punk and the Monarchy

One of punk's defining moments, at least as far as popular memory and media reaction are concerned, was the release of the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen'. Timed to coincide with Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee, Savage says of it: 'The Sex Pistols appeared with all the force of a hand-grenade tossed into an arrangement of gladioli. "God Save the Queen" was the only serious anti-Jubilee protest, the only rallying call for those who didn't agree with the Jubilee because they didn't like the Queen.'³⁸

Ostensibly, at least, the Sex Pistols' gesture appears to have had little impact on its intended target. Biographies of the Queen and histories of the Monarchy contain no reference to the Sex Pistols' irreverent tribute to Her Majesty's Jubilee, whether these books are authored by monarchists or republicans.³⁹ Of course, such omission is no guarantee that the Pistols made no impact. Certainly, as we note below, other elite institutions, such as the BBC, did respond as if to protect the Queen. But the de-briefings – held in the UK's National Archives – of those involved in organizing the Jubilee events make no mention of punk's disruptive ambitions. Sir Philip Moore, Deputy Private Secretary to the Queen, reported only that '[t]here had been an overwhelming popular response to the Jubilee [...] It was so encouraging to see so many young people among them [the crowds], all obviously enjoying the celebrations.' Despite 'the difficult economic climate', the only complaints Moore acknowledged related to the seating arrangements for the Thanksgiving Service in St Paul's.⁴⁰

There is one qualifying note to be added to this air of complacency. The *Sunday Mirror* reported that t-shirts with the image of the Queen with a safety pin through her nose had caused some disquiet: 'Buckingham Palace was far from

amused. A spokesman said sternly: "We think it is in deplorable taste".⁴¹ Calls to ban the shirt were, however, rebuffed.

'A Fascist regime': central government responses to punk

In the upper-echelons of government, punk appeared to attract equally little attention from Ministers and policy-makers. Kenneth Marks, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, did quote *The Economist's* view of punks as the 'blank generation' and cited the lyrics of The Clash in expressing concern about what punk symbolized, but this did not prompt action.⁴² The diaries of leading members of the government, Barbara Castle and Tony Benn, lack any reference to punk or the Sex Pistols.⁴³ The same is true for Bernard (now Lord) Donoughue, who was adviser to Prime Minister James Callaghan at the time. For the week in which the Sex Pistols swore on the *Today* show, Donoughue appears to have been worried only by rows in Cabinet, not those on early evening television.⁴⁴

Again, we can add a small caveat. While his diaries are silent on punk, Benn was not entirely oblivious of its potential. Alwyn Turner quotes him as saying of a Rock Against Racism event: 'There were tens of thousands of young people [...] banners and badges and punk rockers, just a tremendous gathering [...] it is a tragedy that the Labour Party can't give a firmer lead, but it has never done so.'⁴⁵ Generally, though, it seems that punk did not have the impact that dance culture was later to have when the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) made specific reference to 'repetitive beats' in its bid to outlaw illegal raves; or indeed that 'pirate radio stations' had had in an earlier era.

However, while punk itself appears not to have featured on the political agenda, the government was, in fact, devoting a surprising amount of time to matters musical in 1976. The Home Office was determined to regulate music and dancing. This was not a direct response to fears of the effects of either, but rather a consequence of reforms to local government which meant that local authorities were about to lose their powers to license music and dancing. At the same time, the Department of Environment had established a committee of enquiry into the licensing of pop festivals, following disturbances at free festivals in the mid-1970s.⁴⁶ The two departments of state found themselves on different sides of an argument about live music, and Whitehall saw civil servants agonizing over the distinctions between a 'pop concert' and a 'pop festival'.⁴⁷ They deliberated over what exactly it was about music and dancing that was of concern – was it safety and hygiene (as the Home Office tended to think) or drinking and liquor licensing (as representatives of the Magistrates insisted)?⁴⁸

What is notable about these animated exchanges is the absence of any reference to punk or to the threats it might pose. When the Magistrates' representatives talked about the possibility of 'rowdyism' caused by drink, they were thinking of 'the growing number of disco clubs' rather than the clubs associated with punk like the Vortex or the Roxy.⁴⁹ But perhaps more significantly, both the Department of the Environment and the Home Office were wary of introducing legislation to license music and dancing because of the 'political controversy' it was likely to cause.⁵⁰ So it seems that, according to the government's own archives, during the period in which punk was at its height, Whitehall was more inclined to avoid controversy than to confront it.

Parliament, parliamentarians and punk

In 2015, the press release for John Lydon's (formerly Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols) autobiography, *Anger Is An Energy*, included the following claim: 'So revolutionary was [Lydon's] influence, he was even discussed in the Houses of Parliament under the Traitors and Treasons Act, which still carries the death penalty.'⁵¹ The claim is wholly unfounded.⁵² Hansard, the official record of parliamentary debates, contains no record of any such discussion. Indeed, Parliament appears to have been largely, if not completely, indifferent to punk in the mid-to-late 1970s. Two MPs (Marcus Lipton for Labour and Neville Trotter for the Conservatives) sought – unsuccessfully – to obtain a blanket ban for the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen' (and perhaps thereby triggered the 'traitor and treason' myth).⁵³ Other complainants had more mundane objections. Former Prime Minister Edward Heath bemoaned the fact that he was unable to make out the lyrics to the song, adding ruefully that 'part of the significance of punk is the words.'⁵⁴

Like Whitehall, Westminster was more interested in the general regulation of pop concerts during the height of punk's notoriety.⁵⁵ Amidst the debates of June 1977, health and safety issues rather than political threat proved the order of the day. Bruce George MP did suggest that risks to health and safety had been 'exacerbated by the development of punk rock which originated in the United States', calling in evidence a *Sunday People* investigation into punk, which, while conceding that it might be exaggerated, persuaded him of punk's capacity to 'deliberately provoke violence'.⁵⁶ But other MPs seemed unaware or uninterested. On the first night of the Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy' tour – due to take place in Norwich but

cancelled following the Grundy incident – the local MP did write to the Department of Education and Science, though only to enquire about whether any public expenditure had been incurred. He was reassured that it had not.⁵⁷

These are the rare examples of parliamentarians showing a direct interest in punk, at least within the palace of Westminster. It was suggested that EMI's decision to drop the Sex Pistols was hastened by the MP Robert Adley's letter to the company chairman, Sir John Read. Adley insisted that the company should neither be 'financing' nor 'sponsoring' a group of 'ill-mannered louts'.⁵⁸ Apart from this direct intervention, the House of Commons took little or no notice of punk, save to supplement parliamentarians' vocabulary. In the chamber, Nigel Lawson described the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Denis Healey) as a 'punk rock version' of Labour's former Prime Minister (Harold Wilson).⁵⁹ The MP Jeff Rooker MP disparaged a proposed reform as 'punk law'.⁶⁰ And Prime Minister James Callaghan complained: 'When I tried to listen to the news on the set in my hotel in Glasgow early this morning, all I could get was punk rock music.'⁶¹ In each case, 'punk' was used as a term of abuse, but not in a manner that suggests it carried any sort of overtly political threat.⁶²

'Absolutely bloody revolting': local government confrontations with punk

Following the cancellations that affected the Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy' tour in December 1976, Julie Burchill announced, '[t]he Fascists are in the council chambers, not on the stage.'⁶³ *Melody Maker* used less intemperate language, but shared the view that punk's challenge was being felt more in the local than the national elected assemblies: 'In London, the attitude towards punk has become even more confused

after the recent elections which switched control of the Greater London Council from Labour to the Tories [...] Local councils outside London have reacted strongly against the new wave.’⁶⁴ Bernard Brooke-Partridge of the GLC was particularly outspoken: ‘I think the Sex Pistols are absolutely bloody revolting [...] It is a deliberate incitement to anti-social behaviour.’⁶⁵ An infamous ‘blacklist’ of punk bands was reputedly in circulation around the GLC, though no evidence can be found in the archives.⁶⁶ Certainly, Brooks-Partridge was not alone in his views; councils across the UK were similarly minded and took action to prevent punk bands from playing. This was, of course, a consequence of local councils’ direct responsibility for many of the venues at which punk was to be performed. And though not all local authorities responded in the same way, respond they did.

Throughout the later 1970s, the weekly music papers reported frequent incidents of punk being banned from local venues. The excuses for the bans extended from fear of violence to moral censoriousness. Most of these cases were prompted by national news reports or events. And the targeting was pretty indiscriminate, with ‘punk’ being a catch-all term for any act that might cause some kind of disturbance. Under the headline ‘Big Brother Declares War on New-Wave’, the *NME* reported that The Stranglers – who had fallen foul of the GLC after their singer Hugh Cornwall had taken to the Rainbow stage in a ‘Fuck’ t-shirt – had had seven dates of their UK tour pulled by ‘various local authorities’ (Guildford, Torquay, Southend, Leeds, Blackpool, Blackburn, Nottingham and St Albans).⁶⁷ All except Blackpool (where there was a booking mix-up) were stopped by local councils. Torquay council announced: ‘The type of entertainment which is associated with this type of group is not in keeping with the council’s policy of entertainments in any of

its theatres or public halls under its control'. Leeds council called the band 'undesirable' and Nottingham 'unsuitable'. The Damned, too, were banned from Stafford, Southampton, Newcastle, West Runton, Cheltenham and Southampton during the same period.⁶⁸

At the local level, then, there is a record of political representatives expressing anxiety about the effect of punk and, unlike their national colleagues, responding directly to it. They were in the 'front-line'; they saw themselves as having little choice. Typically, however, their response was inspired more by the 'traditional' concerns of social order that accompanied other forms of culture (most notably football) than by politics as such. Or to quote three of the local councillors who appeared on a 1977 BBC *Brass Tacks* documentary dedicated to 'punk rock', their reasons for banning punk bands from playing their respective cities related to 'noise' and 'damage' (Birmingham's Edward Hanson), 'public disorder' (Glasgow's John Young) and the use of 'foul language' unsuitable for young adults (Newcastle's Arthur Stable).⁶⁹

The Day After Today: universities and the Sex Pistols' tour

Several of the first wave of cancelled punk concerts were to have been held at universities or polytechnics. Institutions of higher education have long been key to the infrastructure that has enabled popular music (particularly rock) to thrive.⁷⁰ And colleges, as part of the educational establishment, were implicated in punk's politics; not always positively. When The Clash played Lanchester Polytechnic in November 1976, the Students Union refused to pay them because they took 'White Riot' to be a racist song.⁷¹ More (in)famously, the press reaction to the Sex Pistols' television

appearance on the *Today* show coincided with their first national tour. The history of the tour and its accompanying cancellations has been well-documented, especially the media's account of it.⁷² What has received less attention is what happened in the higher education institutions themselves, and what exactly it was that they feared. We offer one example, that of the University of East Anglia (UEA), where the tour was due to begin on 3 December 1976.

Very soon after the *Today* show had aired, and the press had the Sex Pistols splashed across their front page, the Vice-Chancellor of UEA, Sir Frank Thistlethwaite, took the decision to cancel the band's imminent concert. The official explanation spoke of 'the publicity surrounding the group and its reported attitude to violence', a view that was reiterated by the University's Information Officer who said that: '[t]he university cannot be satisfied that this concert would go off peacefully.'⁷³ What is not clear from these statements or any of the archival evidence is how the *Today* show was being connected to a fear of violence. The band's behaviour might have broken the content codes for early evening television, but no acts of aggression were involved. Nonetheless, it was thought that violence might ensue (and before the ban, steps were taken to increase security).

The UEA Students' Union was divided over the decision. There were those who were disappointed by the cancellation, and who protested by moving a motion of 'no confidence' in their President. The President himself, on the other hand, was less concerned about whether the decision was right, and more worried about what the cancellation meant for his union's autonomy and finances (a cancellation fee of £750 was involved).⁷⁴

The Vice-Chancellor helped to defuse the tension by agreeing that the university, rather than union, would bear the cost of the cancellation.⁷⁵ After this, the university's archives fall virtually silent on the Sex Pistols. The Council – the sovereign body of the University – was not invited to comment on the decision. However, the archives do contain a press cutting of a review of the Pistols' performance at Leeds Polytechnic. Scribbled in the margin are the words 'I take it that we can now await the immediate demise of Leeds Polytechnic as an educational establishment.'⁷⁶ Whether written in jest or not, it is perhaps revealing of an anxiety that association with punk might signify for the University. It suggested that while safety might have been the formal reason for the ban, there were other considerations in play, not least of these was the reputation of the UEA as an 'educational establishment' and punk's potentially deleterious impact.

'Commie bastards': the police and punk

Local authorities and universities acted closely with the police, and there is evidence of the latter taking some interest in punks and their activities. Unfortunately, the London Metropolitan Police files reveal little except general concern over violence and safety at gigs. There were exceptions. The Chief Constable of Thames Valley, David Holdsworth, did regard pop music in general as a cancer destroying society.⁷⁷ And Bruno of The Rejects complained that after being arrested by the police he was called a 'commie bastard'.⁷⁸ Otherwise, however, the police's encounters with punk appeared to fit more narrowly into their law and order remit.

There were, nonetheless, several relatively high-profile incidents involving punks and the police. Most obviously, there were the arrests of Malcolm McLaren

and others in the Sex Pistols' inner-circle, following the band's Thames boat trip in the summer of 1977. Johnny Rotten – who later complained of repeated raids on his Gunter Grove home – was charged with possession of amphetamines in the spring of the same year, while Joe Strummer, Topper Headon and Paul Simonon of The Clash were arrested for various minor misdemeanors in 1977–78.⁷⁹ Two members of The Stranglers were cleared by magistrates of 'being drunk and disorderly and violent' in 1977, and singer Cornwall was later imprisoned for drug offences.⁸⁰ More mundanely, perhaps, the police were called into action with regard fights between punks and others on the King's Road and elsewhere, incidents that were enthusiastically reported by the press.⁸¹

It is hard to be sure from the media coverage whether 'punk' itself was an issue in these incidents. In July 1977, the *NME* ran a report of Birmingham police pressuring Magistrates into refusing a license to a punk festival headlined by The Clash.⁸² More generally, however, 'punk rockers' had by this time become a media cliché for any form of unruly behaviour. One of those involved in the King's Road skirmishes was described as having 'dyed hair and a dog collar and lead round her neck'.⁸³ On the other side of the capital, police were reported to have complained when five 'punk rockers', whom they had arrested for annoying and insulting passers-by in Cheapside, were 'let off' by the courts.⁸⁴ Indeed, tales of individuals being harassed by the police because they looked like punks were common. There were claims that MI5 kept files on the likes of Rotten and the *Sounds* journalist Garry Bushell, but these are hard to confirm. It does seem, though, that Crass were undersurveillance by the security services following their response to the Falklands War.⁸⁵

Police certainly intervened in public representations of punk. BOY, the shop set up by Stephane Raynor to sell punk-related clothes in 1976, was fined for displaying 'the simulated remains of a charred 14 year-old boy'.⁸⁶ It was prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act (1824), which was also deployed when shops in London and elsewhere put the cover of *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* (1977) in their windows.⁸⁷ The shop run by McLaren and Westwood, Sex/Seditionaries, was raided repeatedly by the police because of the 'offensive' nature of its contents; on the eve of punk's emergence, Alan Jones – who worked in the shop – was arrested for wearing a t-shirt depicting two half-naked cowboys.⁸⁸

It is evident, therefore, that the police responded to individual punks, but whether they responded to the punk phenomenon is less clear. Punks fell within the general categories into which police work was typically divided: acts of – and the visual representation of – violence, pornography and anti-social behaviour. None of this was specific or exclusive to punk, but may have been exacerbated by it.

Keeping the Sex Pistols quiet: the BBC and 'God Save the Queen'

The official history of the BBC for the period 1976–78 makes no reference of any kind to punk.⁸⁹ But, like the local authorities, the BBC could not hope to avoid punk, if only because of its continuous dealings with the National Viewers and Listeners' Association led by Mrs Mary Whitehouse. In his witty account of Whitehouse's correspondence with the BBC, Ben Thompson makes occasional reference to her concern about punk, although compared to the other morally depraved television programmes and films that attracted her attention, music seemed to come low on the list. She had detected 'pornographic sensibilities' in The Beatles' 'Please, Please

Me', and expressed shock at Jimi Hendrix's performance style, but in 1977 her attention was caught not by the Sex Pistols, but by Pink Floyd (who referred to her on their album *Animals*).⁹⁰

The complete Whitehouse archives provide little further evidence of punk's impact on her and her correspondence with the BBC. Prior to punk's arrival, she had objected to Sweet's 'Teenage Rampage', Alice Cooper's 'School's Out', Chuck Berry's 'My Ding-a-Ling', Rod Stewart's 'Tonight's the Night', and the Goodies' 'Father Christmas, Do Not Touch Me'.⁹¹ The reasons for her objections were to be found in their sexual innuendo, violence and swearing. But despite punk's own contribution on all these fronts, there is almost no record of her voicing objections to it. The only clue to her reaction is a letter from the BBC explaining their decision on 'Anarchy in the UK'. Michael Swann, Chairman of the Board of Governors, wrote that they would not play the record during the daytime, but would be allowing John Peel to play it at night.⁹²

Despite this it was widely assumed by the music and mainstream press that the BBC had banned the Sex Pistols following the Grundy affair.⁹³ It is not clear whether this was, in fact, the case. The BBC did not ban any tracks from *Never Mind the Bollocks*, while the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) reportedly banned four ('Bodies', 'New York', 'Seventeen' and 'Submission'), to which Capital Radio added 'Holidays in the Sun'.⁹⁴ In 1978, the BBC did ban the Sex Pistols' collaboration with Ronnie Biggs, 'No One Is Innocent', but allowed the band to perform 'Pretty Vacant' on *Top of the Pops* in July 1977.⁹⁵

For the most part, the BBC was more apprehensive about politics (particularly, in relation to Northern Ireland) than bad taste.⁹⁶ What mattered were

songs that threatened BBC impartiality rather than those that offended listeners, and while punk achieved the latter, it less often did the former. At the same time, daytime playlists afforded few opportunities to hear punk (and relatively few punk songs featured in the charts); it was easier to marginalize or ignore punk than to ban it.⁹⁷ The one song that seriously exercised the BBC was 'God Save the Queen', which they did ban, together with all other broadcasters and all high street retailers (Boots, Woolworths and WH Smiths). Capital Radio took legal advice as to whether it had to follow suit (it did).⁹⁸

The story of the song is well-known. 'God Save the Queen' entered the charts at 11, and rose to No. 2, at which point claims were made to its deliberately being kept off the top spot. *NME*, moreover, had it at the top of its own chart. But while Jon Savage provides considerable oral evidence for the accusation of chart fixing, no documentary confirmation seems to exist. And Barry Miles insists that the charts were 'fixed', following a directive from the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) to the British Market Research Bureau, the body responsible for compiling the charts.⁹⁹

The ban on air play, together with the fact that the No. 1 single was a double A-side by a popular, more mainstream artist (Rod Stewart, who was at the top for four weeks) might suggest that the Sex Pistols had simply met their match. Nonetheless, the conspiracy story persists. Writing in 2004, Ryan Moore asserts that "'God Save the Queen" should have reached number one in sales during Jubilee week, but the British Marketing Research Bureau manipulated the chart positions to show only a blacked-out song title and group name at the top spot', although it is not clear on what he bases this allegation.¹⁰⁰ But even if there is no truth to (or at least no evidence of) the claim that the song was refused its rightful place, it is

apparent that the BBC wrestled with the question of how to deal with 'God Save the Queen', and that its anxieties were political rather than moral or aesthetic.

'Punk Skunks': the press reaction to punk

While the BBC remained largely unaffected or unresponsive to punk, the same could not be said of a print media that was moved to fury (or at least the appearance of it) in 1976–77. In the aftermath of the Grundy affair, the *Mirror* headlined its front page 'TV Fury At Rock Cult Filth', and explained: 'A pop group shocked millions of viewers last night with the filthiest language heard on British television.' In an inside comment piece, Russell Miller wrote: 'They wear torn and ragged clothes held together with safety pins. They are boorish, ill-mannered, foul-mouthed, dirty, obnoxious and arrogant. They like to be disliked.'¹⁰¹ The *Daily Mail*'s front page was 'Four-letter Punk Rock group in TV storm'.¹⁰² The *Times* carried a very short piece, although its columnist Ronald Butt occupied rather more space under the headline 'the grubby face of mass punk promotion'.¹⁰³ The *News of the World (NoW)* headlined its two-page story the following weekend 'Punk Skunks'.¹⁰⁴

The press's sense of 'shock' carried on into the new year, when the *NoW* was reporting the swearing and sex lives of women punks such as The Slits.¹⁰⁵ The *Sunday People* was also convinced of punk's evil. 'This is the truth about Punk Rock,' the *People* announced: 'For many weeks a *Sunday People* team of investigators has probed this bizarre business [...] Their verdict on this cult is simply this. It is sick. It is dangerous. It is sinister.'¹⁰⁶ The paper claimed to be convinced that the system was threatened by punk, and that punks were in 'rebellion against everybody and everything'. The journalists found a punk – with O and A levels – who spoke of the

need for 'another Hitler' and the abolition of the monarchy and parliament. The following week, the paper described punk as a 'freaky music craze' masterminded by svengalis such as Miles Copeland jnr.¹⁰⁷

Just as quickly, however, in true moral-panic style, papers began to disarm the folk devil that they had helped create. The *Sunday Times Magazine*, in July 1977, suggested that punk had been 'deoderised and repackaged' as a new business venture. Its largely sympathetic coverage focusing on the success of punk and the political compromises made by its performers.¹⁰⁸ A similar narrative was adopted by the *Daily Mirror* when reporting on The Stranglers' newfound wealth.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, by mid-1977, bar the resurgent scandal triggered by 'God Save the Queen', punk was being satirized and 'normalized' via stories of babies dressed as punks, interviews with the mothers of well-known punks or reports of Edward Heath chatting to 'the XTC punk band' at EMI studios.¹¹⁰

Even during punk's initial flowering, there had actually been a number of sympathetic pieces. Garth Pierce wrote in the *Daily Express* about punk's 'raw energy', while the *Guardian's* Steve Turner extolled punk as another phase in pop's lurid counter-cultural history.¹¹¹ Reviewing The Clash at the Rainbow, *The Times'* Clive Bennett wrote: 'Clash's (sic) hearts are in the right place. They are vehemently anti-racist, anti-National Front and pro tolerance, but the violence of the preaching is unnerving. The music at present drives audiences only to the wanton destruction of seats, but it reflects far deeper problems that demand attention.'¹¹² Even the redtops had been as intrigued as they were later to be concerned. Prior to Grundy, *The Sun* described punk as 'the craziest pop cult of them all' (though it noted 'every generation of teenagers finds something to rebel against'), while the *Mirror* defined it

as just another 'teenage craze'.¹¹³ For the *Sunday People*, a paper whose later anxieties we have already noted, punk's early stirrings were reported in terms of 'Look What Pop Kids Do Now'.¹¹⁴

In summary, while the press gave voice to punk-induced fears, this sentiment was not universally shared and existed for a relatively short time. Stanley Cohen's cycle of moral panic was played out, initially as 'panic', then as caricature and neutralization.¹¹⁵ More importantly, punk was covered, first, for its novelty and then, second, for its anti-social traits that chimed with long-standing media concerns as to social and moral behavior. Beyond the London *Evening News*' brief attempt to associate punk with fascism, the mainstream media showed little interest in the culture's political or anti-establishment credentials.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

We began this article with the observation that much has been claimed for punk and its politics. Support for these claims has tended to be based on the music, the musicians, the rhetoric and the memories of those involved in punk or sympathetic to its aesthetic. Our aim has not been to deny or discount such accounts. Rather, we have sought to complement them with the other sources – those associated with the institutions against which punks directed much of their anger.

Our approach has concentrated on documentary evidence; utilizing the archival record to assess punk's place in British social, cultural and political history. From such a perspective, the impact of punk may be discerned as mixed. Its impact on the upper echelons of government (and beyond) would seem to have been negligible. Lower down, however, punk evidently did have an impact upon local

government and those linked to it (most notably the police and higher education).¹¹⁷

While broadcast and print media were implicated in disseminating some aspects of punk's images and attitudes, the BBC remained largely aloof (except in the case of 'God Save the Queen'). The newspapers were more responsive, but fleetingly and salaciously (and not always in negative ways).

Punk's politics were of the small 'p' type, relating to cultural processes and the provision of space for expression. The anti-establishment rhetoric that rippled through many a punk record and statement were irreverent and iconoclastic. It was the profanities and the violence that provoked reaction far more than the swastikas or references to anarchy or republicanism. To this extent, punk tapped into long-standing elite concerns as to 'the mob', albeit refracted through a 1970s defined, in part, by a political and media discourse of 'crisis' and 'decline'.¹¹⁸

But while our findings might confirm well-established views of punk, they do so on the basis of archival evidence, rather than on some prior political theory. Our suggestion is that the writing of subcultural history cannot be confined to the details of street-level activity, important those these are, but must also look upwards to elite actors.

Methodologically, we asked how far the historian can understand the impact of cultural forces on the establishment through archival research. The answer, again, is mixed. On the one hand, be it *Rock Around the Clock* or 'Anarchy in the UK', the archives help demystify those claims all too easily made about mediated popular culture. On the other, they contain rather dry accounts that appear far removed from the 'something' that resonated for those involved in a cultural moment.

These rather cautious findings should not be seen to support the cause of those who dismiss punk and its rebel sensibilities. If punk's effects were not felt at the time in the seats of formal political and administrative power, then those seats may now be inhabited by erstwhile punks.¹¹⁹ More to the point, both the implicit and explicit politics only made sense in the context of their attitudes to elite centres of power. This matters even if in the end punk is better appreciated as a process of consciousness-raising than any kind of formal attack on British elites. As punk-informed cultures evolved, so their political links became more defined, be it through Rock Against Racism, the overtly anarchist punk that evolved around Crass from 1979, or even the 'white power' music cultivated on the far right. Punk's cultural expression has, over time, helped shape an array of social and political movements in the UK, Europe, US and beyond.¹²⁰ As this suggests, punk's engagement with conventional political forms and established elites may have made little direct impact in the context of 1976–78, but its importance for politics from below *and* above should not be underestimated.

Acknowledgements: TBC

Notes

¹ *Anarchy in the UK*, No. 1, 1976, p. 8. Grammar as in the original.

² Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (London: Faber, 1991), p. 253.

³ Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, *The Boy looked at Johnny* (London: Pluto, 1978) p. 36.

⁴ Mark Perry, 'Anarchy in the Singles', *Sniffin' Glue*, No. 5, 1976, p. 9.

⁵ Sex Pistols, 'God Save the Queen' b/w 'Did You No Wrong', Virgin, 1977.

⁶ 'Punk Rock Revolution', *Sunday People*, 12 June 1977, p. 20.

⁷ Kenneth Marks, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, HC Debs., 14 June 1977, vol. 933.

⁸ Google Scholar suggests that more than 50,000 articles have been written on punk.

There is a journal, *Punk and Post-Punk*, that carries academic studies of the phenomenon, and a regular conference, Keep It Simple, Make It Fast, that hosts punk scholars from across the world. Punk's importance is also acknowledged by mainstream media. In promoting his autobiography, John Lydon was interviewed on BBC Radio's *Today* programme and *Channel 4 News* by John Humphreys and Jon Snow respectively (and respectfully). It was reviewed widely.

⁹ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge) p. 87 (his emphasis)

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 87–88.

¹¹ Dave Laing, *One Chord Wonders* (Milton Keynes: Open University), p. 131; see also, David Laing, 'Interpreting Punk Rock', *Marxism Today*, April 1978, pp. 123–8.

¹² Michelle Phillipov 'Haunted by the Spirit of '77: Punk Studies and the Persistence of Politics', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 20(3) (2006), p. 384. See also Ryan Moore, 'Postmodernism and Punk Subculture: Cultures of Authenticity and Deconstruction', *The Communication Review*, 7 (2004), pp. 307 and 310.

¹³ Dissident views include those of Gary Clarke, 'Defending Ski Jumpers: A Critique of Theories Youth Subcultures', in Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (eds) *The Subcultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 175–80; Simon Frith, *Music For Pleasure* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988); Roger Sabin (ed.), *Punk Rock, So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk* (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁴ Nick Crossley, *Networks of sound, Style and Subversion: The Punk and Post-Punk Worlds of Manchester, London, Liverpool and Sheffield, 1975-80* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015)

¹⁵ Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming* (London: Faber) p. 205.

¹⁶ Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy: The British Experience since 1975* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), p. 6. Matthew Worley, 'Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of 'Consensus'', *Contemporary British History*, 26(3) (2012), pp. 333–54; Matthew Worley, 'While the world was dying, did you wonder why?: Punk, politics and British (fan)zines, 1976–84', *History Workshop Journal*, 79(1) (2015), pp. 76–106.. See also Keith Gildart, *Images of England Through Popular Music* (London: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁷ Dominic Sandbrook, *The Great British Dream Factory: The Strange History of Our National Imagination* (London: Allen Lane, 2015).

¹⁸ Kenneth Morgan, *The People's Peace, British History 1945–1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁹ Brian Harrison, *Finding A Role: The United Kingdom, 1970–1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 436.

²⁰ Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber, 2009), p. 178.

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- ²¹ For example, Lawrence Black, 'An Enlightening Decade? New Histories of 1970s' Britain', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 82 (2012), pp. 174–86.
- ²² Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (London, 2007), p. 361.
- ²³ Crossley, *Networks of Sound, Style and Subversion*; Pete Dale, *Anyone Can Do It: Empowerment, Tradition and the Punk Underground* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Clinton Heylin, *Babylon's Burning: From Punk to Grunge* (London: Canongate, 2007); Savage, *England's Dreaming*; Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop*, (London: Methuen, 1987); Laing, *One Chord Wonders*; Hebdige, *Subculture*
- ²⁴ See Bill Osgerby, 'Stanley Cohen's Folk Devils and Moral Panics Revisited', in Lawrence Black and Pat Thane (eds.), *Reassessing 1970s' Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 187–211; Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Da Capo, 1993).
- ²⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- ²⁶ Burchill and Parsons, *The Boy Looked at Johnny*, p. 37.
- ²⁷ Elijah Wald, *How The Beatles Destroyed Rock 'N' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 152–64.
- ²⁸ Martin and Seagrave, *Anti-Rock*, p. 80.
- ²⁹ Morgan, *The People's Peace*, p. 143. In *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London: Penguin, 2006), Peter Hennessy too writes of the jiving in the aisles and the tearing up of seats that accompanied showings of the film.

³⁰ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain From Suez to the Beatles* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), pp. 432–3.

³¹ David Kynaston, *Family Britain 1951–57* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009) pp. 654–5.

³² Archives consulted: The National Archives; Mary Whitehouse Archive, University of Essex; University of East Anglia Archive; National Sound Archive, British Library; Metropolitan Police Archives and Greater Manchester Police Archives; BBC Written Archives Centre.

³³ For just a few examples, see Viv Albertine, *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes, Music, Music, Music, Boys, Boys, Boys* (London: Faber, 2014); John Lydon, *Anger is an Energy: My Life Uncensored* (London: Dey Street Books, 2014); Glen Matlock, *I Was a Teenage Sex Pistol* (London: Reynolds and Hearn, 2006); Jah Wobble, *Memoirs of a Geezer* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2009); John Robb, *Punk Rock: An Oral History* (London: Ebury Press, 2006).

³⁴ Keith Gildart, 'The Antithesis of Humankind': Exploring Responses to the Sex Pistols' Anarchy Tour 1976', *Cultural and Social History*, 10(1) (2013), pp. 129–49, and his *Images of England Through Popular Music*; Worley, 'Shot by Both Sides', pp. 333–54; Worley, 'While the world was dying, did you wonder why?', pp. 76–106.

³⁵ Hebdige, *Subculture*; Sarah Thornton, *Club Culture: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

³⁶ As characterized by writers such as Jeremy Paxman, *Friends in High Places* (London: Penguin, 1991); Anthony Sampson, *The Anatomy of Britain* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1962); and Owen Jones, *The Establishment: And how they get away with it* (London: Penguin, 2014).

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- ³⁷ For a discussion of the impact of punk on the music industry, see David Hesmondhalgh, 'Post-Punk's attempt to democratize the music industry: the success and failure of Rough Trade', *Popular Music*, 16(3), 1997, pp. 255–74.
- ³⁸ Savage, *England's Dreaming*, p. 352.
- ³⁹ Robert Hardman, *Monarchy: The Royal Family at Work* (London: Ebury Press, 2007); Stephen Haseler, *The End of the House of Windsor* (London: IB Tauris, 1993); Nigel Nicolson, *The Queen and Us* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2003); Ben Pimlott, *The Queen: Elizabeth II and the Monarchy* (London: Harper Collins, 2002); Deborah Strober and Gerald Strober, *The Monarchy: An oral history of Elizabeth II* (New York: Broadway, 2002).
- ⁴⁰ Sub-committee on the Programme of Celebrations, 15 June 1977, National Archives, Home Office file 290/150.
- ⁴¹ 'Jubipunk – Sex Pistols "Pin Up" Rocks Palace', *Sunday Mirror*, 5 June 1977.
- ⁴² HC Debs., 14th June 1977, vol 933.
- ⁴³ Tony Benn, *Against The Tide, Diaries 1973–76* (London: Hutchinson, 1989); Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1974–1976* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1980).
- ⁴⁴ Bernard Donoughue, *Downing Street Diary, Volume Two, With James Calaghan in No. 10* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008).
- ⁴⁵ Alwyn Turner, *Crisis, What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London: Aurum, 2008), p. 223. Although Rock Against Racism was not purely a punk phenomenon, it owed much to the initiative of punk musicians and to the political spirit of the movement.
- ⁴⁶ Michael Clarke, *The Politics of Pop Festivals* (London: Junction Books, 1982)

⁴⁷ Michael Goodwin, Department of Environment to MJ Addison, Home office, 14 November 1975.

⁴⁸ See memo from Leon Brittan, National Archives, ENT 80 400/1/4; MK Finlayson, Home Office, ENT 65 400/1/2; and Booth, 1980

⁴⁹ D. Booth, 'Licensing Amendment Bill', *Justice of the Peace*, 16 August 1980, p. 484.

⁵⁰ NM Johnson, Home office, in correspondence to DoE, 18 January 1980, ENT 76 400/1/5; KP Witney, Home Office, memo 15 December 1975.

⁵¹ Available at: <http://books.simonandschuster.co.uk/Anger-is-an-Energy-My-Life-Uncensored/John-Lydon/9781471137198>; last accessed 18 August 2015.

⁵² *Private Eye*, No 1378, 2014, p. 30.

⁵³ *Sounds*, 18 June 1977. Lipton also objected to the BBC's decision to play the Sex Pistols' 'Pretty Vacant', on the grounds that the b-side, 'No Fun', contained 'an explicit four-letter word' (quoted in the *Sunday People*, 10 July 1977, p. 4).

⁵⁴ *NME*, 10 September 1977, p. 50.

⁵⁵ HC Debs. 14 June 19977, vol. 933, cc. 334–46.

⁵⁶ 'Sex Pistols Get The BBC A Rap', *Sunday People*, 10 July 1977, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Letter, 31 January 1977, UEA Archive.

⁵⁸ Letter quoted in Brian Southall, *Sex Pistols: 90 Days at EMI* (London: Omnibus, 2007), p. 117.

⁵⁹ HC Debs., 21 July 1977.

⁶⁰ HC Debs., 23 February 1978.

⁶¹ HC Debs., Prime Minister's Questions, 2 May 1978.

⁶² Malcolm McLaren reported that it was the National Front, rather than parliamentarians, who were minded to attack the Sex Pistols: 'The anti-Royalist thing

has annoyed a lot of people, coming when it did [...] But I am sure that the attack on Johnny is something much more political and organised. John told me that some of those who attacked him were National Front people' (*Melody Maker*, 2 July 1977, p. 3).

⁶³ *NME*, 11 December 1976, p. 6.

⁶⁴ *Melody Maker*, 4 June 1977, p. 3. See also *Sounds* for 9 July 1977, the front cover of which had a list of punk gigs with the word 'cancelled' printed across it. The trapline read: 'But who's to blame, the establishment or the media?'

⁶⁵ Quoted in *NME*, 9 July 1977, pp. 27–9.

⁶⁶ See, for example, 'The Punk Rock Problem: All Dressed Down, Nowhere to Go' *Melody Maker*, 22 January 1977, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *NME*, 4 June 1977, p. 3. See also Brian Harrigan, 'Local Censors out in Force to Ban Punk Rock Groups', *Melody Maker*, 4 June 1977, p. 3.

⁶⁸ In almost all these cases the council acted first, but on occasion promoters cancelled in anticipation of local political reaction. The Clash's show in Belfast was cancelled too, but not for fear of their impact. It was reported that no one would insure the gig. This was at the height of the Troubles, during which it was possible for residents and others to insure themselves against terrorism, but not apparently against the dangers of playing rock'n'roll.

⁶⁹ 'Punk Rock', *Brass Tacks*, BBC, broadcast 3 August 1977.

⁷⁰ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop*.

⁷¹ Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute: A History of Protest Songs* (London: Faber, 2011), p. 344.

⁷² Gildart, 'The Antithesis of Humankind', pp. 129–49.

⁷³ 'UEA Shoots Down Sex Pistols concert', *Eastern Evening News*, 3 December 1976.

⁷⁴ Letter, 20 December 1976, UEA Archive.

⁷⁵ Letter, 22 December 1976, UEA Archive.

⁷⁶ UEA Archive, 9 December 1976.

⁷⁷ Quoted in 'Now the punk backlash threatens all rock', *Melody Maker*, 25 June 1977, p. 3.

⁷⁸ *Sounds*, 27 August 1997, p. 39.

⁷⁹ 'Bail for 'punk' manager', *Daily Express*, 9 June 1977, p. 7; *The Sun*, 14 June 1977, p. 3; *The Times*, 14 June 1977, p. 3; Pat Gilbert, *Passion is a Fashion: The Real Story of The Clash* (London: Da Capo, 2009), pp. 183–5.

⁸⁰ *Guardian*, 17 November 1977.

⁸¹ 'Battle for Punk territory – the King's Road', *Daily Express*, 1 August 1977; 'Punk Sock! Shoppers flee the teenage brawlers', *Daily Mirror*, 1 August 1977, pp. 2–3; 'Battling Punks Copped!', *Sunday People*, 31 July 1977, p. 2.

⁸² 'Police Ban hits Clash Punkfest', *NME*, 16 July 1977, p. 3.

⁸³ *The Times*, 2 August 1977, p. 3.

⁸⁴ 'Get tough! Courts "soft" on Soccer hooligans and punks', *Daily Express*, 14 October 1977, p. 18.

⁸⁵ The claim was made by David Shayler, *Guardian*, 25 August 1997; see also George Berger, *The Story of Crass* (London: Omnibus, 2006), pp.240-4, and Penny Rimbaud, *Shibboleth* (Chico, CA: AR Press), pp. 258-9.

⁸⁶ 'Grisly window on punk world', *Guardian*, 15 September 1977, p. 3.

⁸⁷ *Guardian*, 10 November 1977, p. 1. Magistrates in Nottingham, in fact, determined that the album cover was not indecent (*The Times*, 25 November 1977, p. 2).

⁸⁸ *NME*, 18 November 1978 and 2 December 1978.

⁸⁹ Jean Seaton, *'Pinkoes and Traitors': The BBC and the Nation, 1974–1987* (London: Profile Books, 2015).

⁹⁰ Ben Thompson, *Ban This Filth! Letters from the Mary Whitehouse Archive* (London: Faber, 2013), pp. 87, 93–5 and 108.

⁹¹ Whitehouse Archives, Box 33, University of Essex.

⁹² Letter, 5 January 1977, Whitehouse Archive, Box 41, University of Essex.

⁹³ 'Pistols on TV as BBC Ban Ends', *The Sun*, 14th July 1977, p. 3; see also Martin Cloonan, *Banned! Censorship of Popular Music in Britain, 1967–1992*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996).

⁹⁴ 'Punk record is a load of legal trouble', *Guardian*, 10 November 1977, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Laing, *One Chord Wonders*, pp. 139 and 75.

⁹⁶ Seaton, *'Pinkoes and Traitors'*, Chapters 1 and 3.

⁹⁷ See the 'playlists' compiled in the BBC archive, Caversham.

⁹⁸ 'Attacks on punk rock group outside public house', *The Times*, 22 June 1977, p. 13.

⁹⁹ Savage, *England's Dreaming*, pp. 349 and 364–5. Barry Miles, *London Calling: A Countercultural History of London Since 1945*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2010), p. 361.

¹⁰⁰ Moore, 'Postmodernism and Punk Subculture', p. 310. The source for the claim is given as 'Savage, 1992, pp. 261–7'. These pages refer to the Pistols' Grundy show appearance, and to the cancellation of part of the national tour, and not to any chart-rigging. Scepticism about the claim of chart-fixing is also expressed by Bob Stanley, *Yeah, Yeah, Yeah: The Story of Modern Pop* (London: Faber, 2013), p 435.

¹⁰¹ *Daily Mirror*, 2 December 1976.

¹⁰² *Daily Mail*, 2 December 1976.

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- ¹⁰³ *The Times*, 2 December 1976, p. 4 and 14.
- ¹⁰⁴ *News of the World*, 5 December 1976, pp. 10–11.
- ¹⁰⁵ ‘Here come the Punkesses’, *News of the World*, 16 January 1977, p. 3.
- ¹⁰⁶ ‘Punk Rock Revolution’, *Sunday People*, 12th June 1977, pp. 20–21.
- ¹⁰⁷ ‘The Punk Rock Exploiters’, *Sunday People*, 19 June 1977, pp. 8–9. Copeland’s father had worked for the US Central Intelligence Agency.
- ¹⁰⁸ Gordon Burn, ‘Good Clean Punk’, *Sunday Times Magazine*, 17 July 1977, pp. 28–33.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Daily Mirror*, 8 October 1977, p. 11.
- ¹¹⁰ ‘It’s Mean Dean, The punk Rock Babe, NoW, 25 Sept 1977, p. 1; ‘Mini-Punk! Ear Pierce for Boy, 2’, *Sun*, 27 August 1977; ‘A Ted The Punks Liked’, *Daily Express*, 1 September 1977; ‘A week in the life of Horrible Hardy, punk’, *Daily Express*, 15 August 1977, p. 20.
- ¹¹¹ *Daily Express*, 14 June 1977, p. 12; *Guardian*, 3 December 1976, p. 13.
- ¹¹² *The Times*, 11 May 1977, p. 13.
- ¹¹³ *The Sun*, 15 October 1977, pp. 16–17; *Daily Mirror*, 1 December 1976, p. 17.
- ¹¹⁴ *Sunday People*, 3 October 1976, p. 1. Dance culture was treated in a similarly lighthearted way when it first put in a media appearance.
- ¹¹⁵ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: Routledge, 1972).
- ¹¹⁶ John Blake, ‘Rock’s Swastika Revolution’, *Evening News*, 7 May 1977.
- ¹¹⁷ Mecca, Britain’s largest ballroom chain, banned punk bands from playing their venues in 1977. Rank banned the Sex Pistols, but would consider other groups individually. See *NME*, 16 July 1977, p. 3.
- ¹¹⁸ Jim Tomlinson, ‘Thrice Denied: “Declinism” as a Recurrent Theme in

British History in the Long Twentieth Century', *Twentieth Century British History*, 20(2), 2009, pp. 227–51; Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983).

¹¹⁹ John Lydon's recent appearance on leading news shows may say as much about who edits those shows as it does about Lydon and punk. Anecdotally, we are aware of senior university managers who happily recall their days as punk fans. On 4 June 1977, the *Melody Maker* ran an interview with Johnny Rotten. In it he said 'they can shut us out but they can't shut us up'. It may be that they were shut out then, but they have been let back in now.

¹²⁰ Martha Gessen, *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot* (London: Granta, 2014); Sroja Popovic, *Blueprint for Revolution* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2015).